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Il picchio e il codice delle api: Itinerari mitici e orizzonte storico-culturale della famiglia nell'antica Grecia: Tra i Misteri di Eleusi e la città di Atene . Paolo Scarpi

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Review

Reviewed Work(s):

Il picchio e il codice delle api: Itinerari mitici e orizzonte storico-culturale della famiglia nell'antica Grecia: Tra i Misteri di Eleusi e la città di Atene

by Paolo Scarpi

Review by: Ioan Petru Culianu

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In other words, Sanders ignores the critical program of biblical studies of more than two hundred years, as that program has addressed the problems of the documents of the rabbinic canon. [JACOB NEUSNER, *Brown University*]

Jews, Pagans, and Christians in Conflict. By DAVID ROKEAH. *Studia Post-biblica*, vol. 33. Jerusalem and Leiden: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, E. J. Brill, 1982. Pp. 232.

This erudite book spends a great deal of effort at proving a proposition that many scholars will find devoid of interest or consequence, namely, that between pagans and Christians there was a polemic but between Jews and Christians only a dispute. While the author is surely wrong, he reviews a great many interesting passages and contributes diverse aperçus of no little value. So, on the good side, Rokeah amasses a great deal of evidence and comments on it. On the bad side, the evidence is meant to prove an insubstantial and trivial point—and in the end fails to do so. Let me explain.

Rokeah's book follows no clear argument or program but consists in the main of a mass of disjointed observations. The thesis is announced but never analyzed. The author constantly loses his way in a mass of undifferentiated detail. Yet these traits do not constitute the important failure of the book. What Rokeah does is ignore nearly the entirety of scholarly work in the past century and that on a variety of subjects.

In addition, he utilizes categories that homogenize highly differentiated phenomena and treats as fact every allegation in the rabbinic sources that a given authority made a given statement or carried out a specified action. Consequently, his categories of analysis make no sense, and his use of evidence is based on false premises concerning the character of the evidence. Since he provides no bibliography, furthermore, we know what he has read only from footnotes. These consist mainly, though not exclusively, of references to sources. He has read a handful of scholars, most of them in Jerusalem or in communication with Jerusalem.

What he does not do is deal with that rather substantial corpus of scholarship in the West in which such categories as "Judaism," "Christianity," and "paganism" raise more questions than they answer. For Rokeah, by contrast, there really was a "Judaism," defined by harmonizing pretty much all sources written by Jews, and so too a "Christianity" and a "paganism." These gross categories obscure many of the points this book attempts to make. [JACOB NEUSNER, *Brown University*]

Il picchio e il codice delle api: Itinerari mitici e orizzonte storico-culturale della famiglia nell'antica Grecia: Tra i Misteri di Eleusi e la città di Atene. By PAOLO SCARPI. Padua: Bloom Edizioni, 1984. Pp. 184.

The Woodpecker and the Code of the Bees is a beautiful book, which, as the author remarks in his introduction, is actually dedicated not to the woodpecker as such but to its apparitions in mythical vesture, in the first instance as

the culture hero Keleos (woodpecker) at Eleusis. Scarpi, a young historian of religions, has dedicated an interesting book to the Eleusinian mysteries (*Lettere sulla religione classica* [Florence, 1976]), of which the present volume represents, in some sort, the continuation.

For Scarpi, the green woodpecker Keleos, who plays in the mythical narrative a role comparable to that of the woodpecker in other cultural traditions, namely, that of a culture hero performing the passage from a savage to a cultural state, represents the center of a complicated network of social relationships between Eleusis and the main town, Athens.

The main body of the book consists of an attempt to grasp the significance of a myth reported by Antoninus Liberalis (*Metamorphosis* 11). Each sequence of the myth is patiently decoded in order to ascertain the particular cultural code used in this myth as well as in that of Keleos, the host of Demeter at Eleusis. Here the woodpecker ceases to be important. His daughters—the “bees”—are. The myth, according to Scarpi, holds the model of the perfect society of the bees up against human domestic relationships, warning at the same time against sexual abuses. The social role of the Athenian mother is thus ostensibly codified.

Paolo Scarpi is a young Italian historian of religions using a methodology that is a blending of French structuralism and cultural anthropology. He belongs to the disciples of Angelo Brelich, though not to the “Roman school” of the late master. As an “independent,” he has already circumscribed his peculiar place in Italian scholarship today. [IOAN PETRU CULIANU, *University of Groningen*]

La regioni del silenzio: Studi sui disagi della comunicazione. Edited by MARIA GRAZIA CIANI. Padua: Bloom Edizioni, 1983. Pp. 172.

Six young Italian scholars, among whom are two historians of religions, several philologists, and a psychoanalyst, have put together this fine volume on silence (religious) and the difficulties of communication.

The book deserves being mentioned as an elegant Italian attempt at establishing a common methodology outside the consolidated Italian schools in history of religions. The promoter of this methodology, which is a blending of structuralism and cultural anthropology, is Paolo Scarpi; and he applies it here to the case of the Eleusinian mysteries. Dario M. Cosi is another subtle representative of the same methodology, which he applies to the case of Battos, the stuttering founder of Cyrene.

The other four contributions are dedicated, respectively, to the silence in myth (the psychoanalyst Alberto Schön), religious silence in Herodotus and the Athenian theater (Fabio Mora), religious silence according to Pausanias (Donatella Foccardi), and the Greek medical tradition on troubles of speaking (Maria Grazia Ciani).

Born from the wish to overcome the difficulties of communication among scholars, this elegant book represents at the same time one of the few volumes put together from several contributions that tries to define a common approach